

**Consular Webchat
US Embassy, Damascus
February 04, 2010**

Mark Goldrup: Hello. Please feel free to submit questions ahead of time. We will answer all the questions previously received, as well as any new questions that come up, during the live chat this coming Thursday, February 4, from 3:30-4:30 pm Damascus time.

Mark Goldrup: Welcome everyone and thanks for participating in our web chat. We are ready to get started now. I'll begin posting answers to some of the questions we've already received. Please chime in whenever you'd like!

Question [eyad]: my wife so sick [in the US]. she has cancer and need me next to her and i don't have any confirmation that i am her husband and she can't do any thing right now. just my qastion how i can be with her if she can't help her self or i can't go there coz i am not american...just i which some one belve me and help me to be with her

Answer [Mark Goldrup]: It sounds like a very difficult situation, and I'm sorry to hear you and your wife are facing such problems. Our visa decisions are guided by law. If you were hoping to apply for an immigrant visa – one that would allow you to live permanently in the US – you would definitely need to provide official, documentary evidence of your marriage relationship. In fact, an immigrant visa would not be possible without your wife being able to fill out a petition for you and file it with the National Visa Center (I am inferring that your wife is an American citizen or green card holder). If you are seeking a non-immigrant visa, you are certainly free to apply at any time. However, please be aware that the key factor in non-immigrant visa decisions is whether or not an applicant can demonstrate stronger ties to their home country than to the US. Having a wife in the US would make it more difficult to receive a non-immigrant visa. To some extent, a medical emergency such as you are describing may also be a factor. But again, you would need to provide some evidence – such as doctors' letters or hospital records from the US – that clarify your wife's condition and her need for you to be there. Once you've provided that, you would still need to be able to convince the adjudicating officer that you would return to Syria after assisting your wife before a non-immigrant visa could be issued. Whichever route you try to go, it seems to me that you will need to establish contact with your wife or her family in order to get the necessary information.

Q: [Bassel]: What are the condition that allows me to have a visa?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thanks Bassel. The exact conditions are different according to the type of visa you are seeking. For example, exchange visas and student visas are dependent on having been accepted to the exchange program in question or to an educational institution in the US, in addition to other factors. But in general, if you are talking about a B1/B2 visa (what is sometimes called a "tourist visa"), the most important condition is that you be able to convince the interviewing consular officer that your ties to your home country are strong enough to ensure you will come back after your visit. This condition can mean vastly different things for different people. It may mean showing that you have family connections, or a job that you enjoy, or properties that you own. There is no "one size fits all" requirement here. The key is that you need to not only be able to tell the officer that you plan to come back after your visit to the US, but that you are able to show him why. If there is anything unusual in your case – your entire family except you are American citizens, for example, or you have recently lost your job and are looking for work – you need to be prepared to explain to the officer very clearly why

these factors will not cause you to stay in the United States. hope that helps!

Q: [Bassel]: Hi am a medicine student and i like to study abroad in the US and i was wondering how can I get a visa and what are my odds?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: : Great question, Bassel. We actually see many medical students applying for nonimmigrant visas. It seems that Syria is a great producer of doctors! For most medical students, going to take the USMLE exams or participate in elective courses at US universities, the key is for you to be able to demonstrate that you are a serious medical student, with acceptable grades and scores on the USMLE exams (Step 1 and Clinical Knowledge) that you may have already taken.

Q: [mahmoud]: HI can i fill ds 157 by hand writting

Sara Cobb: For the time being, yes, you have to fill out the DS-157 by hand. Within two weeks, however, we will be switching to a new, all-electronic application, the DS-160. This will replace both DS-156 and the DS-157.

Q: [Amne Darwish Talab]: A lot of people from our community always complain that if there relatives that are young and apply for visitor visas to attend a wedding or graduation or just for fun are always refused. Is there something specific about the younger group between say 18 and 25 that are hardly ever given visas

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thanks for the question Amne. We certainly understand that perception. Every person's situation in life is different, and we try to evaluate them fairly. A person in university will have different reasons to depart the U.S. than will a person who has retired after living all their life among a well develop set of family, friends and social support. A person who has been employed in a job that they enjoy will have different reasons to return home from the U.S. than someone who has other aspirations. We, as consular officers have to look at each case individually and evaluate that person's ties outside the U.S. I personally have issued visas to many young, single people, while at the same time, I have had to deny visas to people who were well beyond college, but could not explain what their ties outside the U.S. were. My advice to people of that age group is to be as prepared as they possibly can to explain what exactly would lead them to return to Syria after their visit. As a follow-on, unrelated note, our Consul General sends his regards.

Q: [Aktham]: good day to you... is this session only about Visa matters, or can there be questions regarding study advice??

Sara Cobb: We are happy to answer questions about studying in the U.S. as well. The American embassy in Damascus has an Educational Advising and Testing Office that provides information on studying in the U.S. and also administers a full range of standardized tests such as the TOEFL, SAT, and GRE. Our educational advisors are happy to answer whatever questions you have. You can reach them at 33914171 or 33914172. You can also check out their website: <http://damascus.usembassy.gov/eato2.html> . Best of luck!

Q: [Rb]: what is the time expected to have the B1 visa interview after submitting the application ?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: As of today, we have appointments available about one week from when you

complete the online application. Depending on volume, the wait time in Damascus generally varies between a few days and up to two weeks.

Q: [J1Holder]: Hello, I am subject to the J-1 2-year HRR. I am married to a USC and we have two children. Wife applied for GC (130 and rest). The NVC process was completed recently with an interview in Damascus. The representative asked for some documents to proof that my two years have passed. My two years will be completed in September (8months from now). Should I sent the documents and passports now or wait till August, for example?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: I passed your question on to the Immigrant Visa Chief and he explained that you should wait until you have fulfilled the two-year residency requirement before providing the necessary evidence. However, please keep in mind that you have one year from the date of your interview to make contact with the Embassy; otherwise, your case will be administratively closed. You should therefore provide the evidence as soon as you have fulfilled the two-year requirement, or at least make some contact with the Immigrant Visa unit of the Embassy in order to keep the case open.

Q: [Amne Darwish Talab]: THank you for your response and please give my regards to the Consul

Q: [Bassel]: Does the university average account?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Your grades may be a factor in our decision, but they are not determinative by themselves. We are not necessarily looking to evaluate you as a student, but only whether or not your academic background is consistent with your stated purpose of travel.

Q: [SAMER KEBBEH]: HOW COULD WE PROLONG AN IMMIGRANT VISA ABOUT TO EXPIRE ?PLS ANSWER , THANKS

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Hi Samer. Thanks for the question. I have passed it on to our Immigrant Visa section chief and he has explained the answer to me. As we understand your question, you have been issued an immigrant visa to travel to the United States. These visas are valid for a period of six months. If your six months are nearly up, you have two options. First, you could simply travel to the US before the expiration date. As long as you enter before the expiration date, the visa will act as a green card for a period of one year thereafter. While in the US, you could file the application for the permanent green card and make arrangements to have it sent to you in the US or to someone you know there who could forward it onto you in Syria. If this is how you choose to handle it, please keep in mind that immigrant visas are issued with the expectation that you will immigrate and live permanently in the US. If you are outside of the US for more than one year, your green card/immigrant visa will become invalid. Second, if you are unable to travel to the US before the green card expires, you would have the option of returning to the Embassy and getting a new visa put into your passport. If you go this route, you will need to pay a new \$400 issuance fee and you may be subject to a new administrative processing.

Q: [eyad]:mmmm if no one could help me to be with her can any one help me to know if she is ok ..coz her mobile stop from the service

A: [Sara Cobb]: Eyad, you could contact the hospital where she is receiving treatment or the local authorities in her town. Perhaps they can pass your message to her.

Q: [Barnadate Moussa Nader 2]: Dear, the immigrant Visa Section ...

A: [Mark Goldrup]: : Thanks for the question, Barnadate. I have removed the identifying information from your question. For this type of question, the best thing is to contact the Immigrant Visa Section directly on their email at ivdamascus@state.gov . In general, it is very difficult for us to say with any certainty how long the administrative processing will take. But we will certainly yet you know as soon as it is done. In the meantime, you can use that email any time to check status.

Q: [tarek]: how to go america

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thanks for the great question, Tarek. The short answer, of course, is that there are many ways that people go to America. Every day at the Embassy, we issue visas to people going to study, to work, to marry American citizens, to see friends, and simply to see the country. Since this chat is specifically about non-immigrant visas, I'll give you a quick overview of the types of visas we issue most often in Damascus. By far, most of the visas we issue are what we call B1/B2 visas – visas for people who will not be paid to work while they are in the U.S. for a short-term visit. Most people who get B1/B2 visas are going for tourism: to see sights, friends, or family. We also issue F visas to students, J visas to exchange visitors, H visas to people going to work, and many others. An overview of all the different types of visitor visas can be found here:

http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1286.html I hope you find one that suits you!

Q: [Ghayyath]: Thank you very much for this opportunity,I am currently doing my residency in USA/ 3rd year, on H1B visa which I used to renew every year during my vacation time in Syria. My vacation time this year is less than it used to be before. Would 3 weeks be reasonable time to have my visa processed? My 2nd question, why is H1B visa different from J1 in term of being valid only for one entry and 3 months while we are doing residency here?Thank you and have a great time.

A: [Mark Goldrup]: : I hope you enjoy your vacation. Regarding your question, it is difficult to predict the time between visa adjudication and issuance. The adjudicating consular officer will make a decision on

the day of the interview. However, many applicants are subject to special processing and clearance requirements which may take several weeks. I advise you to choose the day of your appointment online before you come to Syria to help get the ball rolling as soon as possible. For more details on how to apply, please check this website http://damascus.usembassy.gov/non-immigrant_visas.html As to the second part of your question, the length of visa validity is based on the principle of reciprocity. This means, essentially, that we give Syrians visas that are valid for the same period as similar visas given to Americans by Syria. The published reciprocity for Syrian H1B visas is One Entry - 3 Months. We cannot make any exceptions. Thank you and good luck with your employment in the US!

Q: [mahmoud]: Hi Mark How are you today

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Hi Mahmoud. I'm doing great, thanks!

Q: [jamal ayoub]: hi....i'm applying for exchange program in U.S for people how's interested in media...i just wanna know the condition,if i wanna have visa?

A: [Sara Cobb]: Hi Jamal. Sorry for the delay...lots of questions! Most exchange program participants go to the US on J visas. If you are accepted to the program, the public affairs section of the embassy will

give you all the information you need on how to apply for a J visa. Best of luck!

Q: [Rb]: I graduated from med school last summer and I'm applying for an observership in the US ... i go B1 visa two years ago to do electives when i was a student and it's expired now ..just want to know about the documents to bring to the interview as a graduate now

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thanks for the question. For medical students, it is a good idea (though not always required) for you to bring a transcript of your grades from university, your USMLE scores (if you've taken the exams before), any evaluation of your performance during your previous electives, and a letter of invitation to the new electives. And, as always, be prepared to explain your purpose and situation verbally as well. Hope that helps!

Q: [Barnadate Moussa Nader 2]: Dear, NI visa section A family consists of the parents and two kids, one is 6 years old, the other is 3 years, and everyone has his own passport. This family wants to get non immigrant visas, have the two kids to apply separate applications, and what is the application(DS 160 or DS 157 + DS156?)Thanks a lotRegardsElias

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Yes, that's exactly right. At the moment, applicants can use either the DS-156 + the DS-157, or the DS-160 which includes the information that used to be found on both. We are in the process of transitioning entirely to the DS-160 and will be using it alone by February 18.

Q: [eyad]: they said they can't give any information about patiint there for federal laws

A: [Sara Cobb]: eyad, i recommend asking the hospital to pass your message to her or her friends/family and someone can call you back to tell you about her condition. hopefully everything is fine!

Q: [Ammar]: If I were a UK citizen and I wanted to visit the US for a clerkship could I apply throught the visa waivering program and would I need to do the USMLE step 1?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Interesting question, and one I hadn't run across before working in Damascus ... but yes, if you qualify for the visa waiver program, you can essentially do whatever you could on a B1/B2. As long as you meet the requirements for the VWP (roundtrip ticket, less than 90 days stay, biometric passport, etc.) you should be fine.

Q: [Amne Darwish Talab]: Can you explain how the business visas work if someone wants to come to the USA as an Entrepreneur. WHat are the requirements to obtain a visa

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thank you again, Amne. Each type of visa is for a different activity in the U.S. "A" is for serving as a diplomat. "C" is to transit the U.S. "F" is to study in the U.S., etc. The standard nonimmigrant visa issued by a U.S. Embassy is the B1/B2 visa. B2 part is "tourism" and the B1 part is "business" An entrepreneur can enter the U.S. with a B1/B2 visa to conduct business, as long as she or he does not receive remuneration from a U.S. source. That is to say that the entrepreneur can meet business contacts, arrange contracts, etc., but the person cannot receive a salary or commission from a U.S. source for the work being done. Nor can the entrepreneur bring with him or her merchandise to sell in the U.S. A person can, however, bring samples or a catalog in order to arrange for future sales once they have returned to their own country. There are other types of visas for people who wish to work in the U.S. and receive remuneration from a U.S. source. There are "H" visas for skilled

professionals, "E" visas for people trading with the U.S. under a trade agreement (there is however no such treaty with Syria), etc. There's a visa for almost every legal activity.

Q: [jamal ayoubé]: thanx in advance

Q: [jamal ayoubé]: hi....i'm applying for exchange program in U.S for people how's interested in media...i just wanna know the condition,if i wanna have visa?

Q: [Rb]: thanks a lot everybody for your help

Q: [eyad]: i don't have any number of her friend i was has nurse mobile all of them stop?can u help me if u can,,i have many evedance here : eyad, the hospital should be able pass any message that you give to them as you are her husband. We believe this is the best way for you to get news about her

Q: [Ammar]: Hi I was wondering how possibly my martial status affect my odds in the visa? for example if i was a medical student and married what should i do to bring my wife with me? is it harder than if I was single?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: : Tough question, Ammar! The answer is that it just depends. We evaluate every case individually. Without making any specific predictions about how your individual case might go, I would say generally that bringing your wife with you would just be one factor among many. As long as you can show that both of you have reasons to visit the US and reasons to return home after your visit to the US, you could both be issued visas.

Q: [Rb]: a friend's grandmother has a greencard but she hasn't been to the US for three years now and her her greencard will expire in 2011 . she's planing to visit her daughter in the US soon and she wants to know what is she supposed to do since she exceeded the six month period to be a way from the states ? will she need to go to the embassy before she leaves ?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: : Unfortunately, your grandmother's green card is now expired. After a green card holder has spent more than one year outside of the US, we would only issue a new immigrant visa under very exceptional circumstances. Your grandmother would need to be able to prove that she had stayed outside for that period of time for reasons that were unanticipated and beyond her control. She would need to come to the Embassy (any weekday at 1pm, other than Thursday) to explain her case to a consular officer.

Q: [eyad]: thank u to help me ?anyway i accept what our god decide .. : best of luck and hope everything is ok

Q: [Ammar]: As a Syrian citizen applying for a clerkship in the US, still in med school what would be sufficient proof of intention to returning to Syria?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: : I'm sorry, Ammar, but there is no way for me to answer the question with any specificity without actually conducting a full interview. In general, it would be helpful to have a letter of invitation to the clerkship that specifies how long it will be and academic transcripts from your university in Syria. But please keep in mind that these documents are helpful but not actually required. The essential thing is that you be able to explain your circumstances and intentions verbally.

Q: [mahmoud]: about visa for work

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thanks Mahmoud. There are actually several different types of working visas, depending on the type of work that you wish to do. The most well known is the H1B visa, which helps many professionals to work in the United States. For more information about the different types of visas available, please take a look at this web page: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1286.html

Q: [Ahmad Abo Al Chamat]: My fiance holds the american nationality, although she lives here in Syria, so how can I apply for a green card based on this fact?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: For a fiance visa, the American Citizen is required to petition with the DHS office nearest her home in the United States. We are not able to accept those petitions directly at the Embassy in Damascus.

Q: [Ammar]: Thank you very much Mr. Mark you have been of a big help to us and we wish us to succeed in convincing you :) ...

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thanks Ammar. I wish the same thing!!

Q: [Baruch:] I have a quick question: If I live in the US on an H1B visa and I'm engaged and my fiance is in Syria. She has all the photos of the engagement and photos of us for the last 3 years that proves we were together. can she apply for an H4 depending on that?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: ONce you are married, you can apply to add your wife as an H4 dependent. You should coordinate through your sponsoring employer to have your wife added to your H1B petition.

Q: [Ahmad Abo Al Chamat]: another thing I wanna ask you about is wether it's applicable to get two visas from the american embassy, at the same time? e.g: F1 and B1??

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Yes, it is possible, and in fact quite common. Many people find that a B1/B2 visa gives them more flexibility if, say, they plan to visit the US for tourism more than one month before arriving to study (the F1 only lets you enter up to 30 days before your studies begin).

Q: [Amne Darwish Talab]: thank you for this webchat, it was very helpful, maybe the next one can be on a immigrant visas or another topic.

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thanks so much for your participation. We are planning to host an immigrant visa chat soon -- it certainly seems like there is interest in IV-related questions. Again, thanks for the thoughtful questions and participation.

Q: [Ahmad Abo Al Chamat]: I'm asking that coz I'm a final year medical student, and I'm corresponding american medical schools for electives, so may I have the two visas, the same time?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: Thank you, Ahmad for raising what may be a misperception about nonimmigrant visas. There isn't a specific period during which you can be in the U.S. or must be out of the U.S. in order to remain qualified for a B1 visa. The important this is that you must have the clear intention to return to your place of residence after your visit to the U.S. When you enter the U.S., the Customs and Border Protection officers at the port of entry will determine how long you can remain in legal status in the U.S. It might be two months; it might be six months. In a special case, it could be a year. If for some reason

you need to extend your period in the U.S., you would need to request authorization from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). All this being said, the next time you applied for a visa, you would also need to explain to the consular officer how it is that you can be away from your place of residence for such long periods and still claim to be well settled.

Q: [Baruch]: well, I already have my H1B visa here. The point is that I forgot to name a durable power of attorney before I came here. and i can't leave my work here at all. Is there a way where she can apply for H4 before marriage? I mean just as my fiancee?

A: [Mark Goldrup]: For an H4, you would have to be married. Otherwise, your fiancée could apply for a B1/B2 visa, but of course she would then be bound by the limits of the B1/B2.

[Mark Goldrup]: Thanks everyone for your participation in this chat. I hope you found it helpful. Please feel free to email us at nivdamascus@state.gov for any more questions related to non-immigrant visas or ivdamascus@state.gov for immigrant visa questions. Thanks and chat with you soon!!

Ammar:Thanks. chat you soon. it's been a nice chatting with you. Thanks, Mark.

“We are committed to providing excellent customer service to you. We’ve recently overhauled our appointment processes to make applying for a visa a simpler, less time-consuming process. Our hope is that answering your questions through this chat will be one more way that we make your experience with the U.S. Embassy a positive one.”